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Foster site on Superfund list

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Contaminated property near the C&D Recycling Plant in Foster Township was named to the federal Superfund list Thursday afternoon, but prompt cleanup of the site may never happen if Congress does not act quickly to renew the federal program.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency named 38 new hazardous waste sites to the list, which allows it to use federal funds to clean up the property. Soil and water samples taken recently from the Pond Creek area site have showed substantial readings of lead, copper, arsenic and other contaminants.

Telephone cables were burned at the recycling plant to melt lead and reclaim copper wire. The cables were washed down in outside pits to cool and clean the wire after the incineration process.

Hal Yates, public relations director for EPA Region III offices in Philadelphia, said that although C&D was added to the roster for cleanup, removing contaminated soil and treating water may not be done immediately.

"Foster Township was proposed for addition to the national priorities list for remedial action," Yates said. "But we were at this time, three months behind already on priorities... and it's anybody's guess what will happen with Superfund."

Yates explained that when the original money was set aside in 1980 for the now-\$1.6 billion kitty, the act detailed a five-year plan to clean up the contaminated sites in the country. Presently, the act is

set to expire on Sept. 30, and no provisions have been made for its continuation.

"We're waiting for Congress to come up with a new act or an extension of this one," Yates said. "If they don't soon, they will have to come up with some other means to cope with the threat posed by hazardous wastes."

And if the federal trust is not renewed, the EPA spokesman said the only way some of the sites could be cleaned up is if people dig into their own pockets for the funding. "And people can't afford anything like that," he added.

But, while EPA is waiting for word on the Superfund allocations — which could contain from \$5 million to \$20 million if renewed — Yates said the federal agency will continue normal proceedings at the newly-selected sites.

"First, a public affairs specialist will be named to keep the residents informed of the status of the site through a community relations plan," Yates said, adding that three people are being considered for the position.

"Then we will go through a 30-day public comment period so we can get as much information as the people are willing to bring forth about the site."

When that data is reported, the EPA will review the information and confirm that what the residents said is true. Next, the site will be added to the national priorities list and remedial action could begin as soon as December.

"But I think it will probably be some time in 1988. Once the site is

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added to the Superfund list, it's at least one year for remedial investigations and feasibility studies to go into effect. That makes it a year to a year and a half until you see any work done on the site," Yates explained.

After the two-month comment period, the EPA will conduct public hearings to discuss project-related issues. Yates said the information about the comment period and hearings will be announced after a public relations person is designated to work with the residents of Foster Township.

But Yates also pointed out that federally regulated cleanups are slowed because many projects are continued from one year to the next, and with the present updating of the lists, several of the confirmed sites are still under EPA reclamation.

And although the Foster Township site is on the Superfund list, it will not be ranked for a starting date until after the preliminary information about the contamination is gathered.

"And it is listed for remedial action, meaning that it poses no long-range threat — not immediate — to public health. There is an avenue of contamination from the site into the environment," Yates said.

Representatives from the state Department of Environmental Resources are now conducting soil and water tests at the site. Mark Carmon, community relations coordinator for DER in Wilkes-Barre, said seven monitoring wells have been sunk by the Roy F. Weston contracting firm in the area near C&D. The wells will be pumped and tested next week in a split sampling process with DER and private residents in the area.

Carmon said the Superfund listing will decide the future of testing and data-gathering at the site.

"If this is named as a state lead (priority) site, the DER will be responsible for the cleanup. But if it is a federal lead, EPA will have to come in to do the work," Carmon explained.

Jane Sulima, a township resident who has a home near the site, said she would prefer that DER continue to monitor the situation and handle the eventual cleanup. "We've finally gotten to know the people, and they know what they're dealing with," Ms. Sulima said.

Four other sites in Pennsylvania were named to the list Thursday, one of them in Pocono Summit, Monroe County. The Route 940 Drum Dump — now listed as a federal priority — is a rural area where up to 600 drums of "unknown materials" were stored. In 1983, the DER detected organic chemicals, including benzene, in on-site soil. About 100 of the drums have already been excavated under DER supervision.

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